PATTERNS OF POWER · THE ORIGIN LINE

# The Shape of the Sieve

*Where Anchors Come From, Why the Capture of the Interpreter Does Not Kill Them, and How to Test a Theory Assembled Entirely From Survivors*

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with Claude (Anthropic) · 2026

*held as tested, not revealed*

# Preface: what this paper is

*The collaboration, the four jobs this paper takes on, and the promise that it stands alone.*

This paper belongs to the Patterns of Power project and is a collaboration. The questions, the direction, the pattern-recognition and the final judgement are the author's; the synthesis, the drafting and the scholarly retrieval were done with Claude, Anthropic's model, with every load-bearing claim checked against a source before anything was built on it. The method is declared because it is a new way of making knowledge and ought to be visible rather than concealed. Where the model disagreed with the author it said so, and more than one of the findings below exists because it did.

The project asks a single question of particular historical orders: how does a distribution of holdings taken by force become an arrangement that armed men will defend rather than contest? How does a warlord's camp become a country? Across some thirty worked cases a set of theoretical papers has accumulated beside the case studies, and three of those papers form what can be called the origin line — an account of where the raw material of political legitimacy comes from. This paper is the fifth in that line, and it takes on four jobs, each of which grows out of the one before it.

The first is **synthesis**. Three papers written separately turn out to describe one machine from three angles: a vulnerability in the human mind, a position that specialisation builds in every complex society, and a thing that occupies the position. Stating them as a single architecture is worth doing on its own, and doing it produces a joint that none of the three names.

The second is **a correction earned by pressing on that joint until it fails.** Two of the three papers, laid side by side, generate a prediction the historical record flatly refutes. Following the refutation rather than smoothing it produces a distinction this project has needed for years without knowing it was missing: the men who interpret a source of legitimacy do two entirely different jobs, and the capture of that class — which is the normal condition of most orders most of the time — destroys one of the jobs while leaving the other perfectly intact. This resolves a pattern the case studies have been bumping into repeatedly, which is that thoroughly servile clergies turn out to be compatible with centuries of stability.

The third job is the one that motivated the paper. A fourth paper in the project, *The Filter*, argues that durable orders are selected rather than designed, because the camps that dissolved left no archive. That argument is almost certainly right. It is also a

**solvent**, and the project has never reckoned with how much it dissolves. If the sample is survivors only, then every regularity the project has found may be a fact about what got written down rather than a fact about the world — and this applies not merely to the origin account but to every finding in the corpus, including the ones the author is most attached to. A substantial part of this paper is an attempt to convert that objection from an excuse into an instrument: to establish where the failures are actually recorded, to specify in advance what evidence would count against the theory, and to state predictions sharp enough to fail.

The fourth job exists because the third is worthless without it. **A paper that proposes a method and never uses it has proposed nothing.** So the instruments are picked up and applied, at length, to a single order that failed: the First Türk Khaganate, which ruled from Manchuria to the Black Sea, was founded in 552, and had broken into competing halves within a generation. It is a case with three properties that make it exactly the right first application. It is a failure rather than a survivor. It is known almost entirely through the archives of literate neighbours rather than its own, which is the displacement thesis being cashed rather than asserted. And it is a **fork in a wholly secular order** — two rulers, one lineage, no priesthood, no scripture — which the project has wanted for some time in order to find out whether an earlier finding about divided authority was a fact about churches or a fact about authority.

**The paper stands alone.** No prior reading is assumed — not of this project, not of anthropology, economics, cognitive science, medieval Europe or Inner Asian history, and not of any scholar named. Every borrowed idea is built from scratch in plain words before it is put to work. Where a technical term is unavoidable it is defined at first use and used consistently thereafter. A reader who has never encountered any of this should be able to follow the whole argument and disagree with it intelligently, which is the only kind of agreement worth having.

**One discipline governs throughout.** The orders examined here were built on conquest, forced labour, slavery, and the binding of populations to land they were forbidden to leave. To explain the machinery by which such arrangements acquired their foundations is not to soften them, and the clarity of an explanation is not a defence of the thing explained. This project states that obligation in the phrase *legibility is not pardon*, and discharges it at length rather than in a clause.

# The question

*One regularity, one solvent, and the fact that they have never been put in the same room.*

Begin with a regularity that has held across every case this project has examined, and that nobody set out to find.

**Every durable order ran on a source of rightfulness that predated it, and every attempt by a ruler to manufacture one for himself failed.**

The first half is easy to document. The Ethiopian emperors claimed descent from a biblical lineage established a thousand years before their dynasty existed. The Seljuk sultans, Turkish warlords who had taken Persia and Iraq by force in the eleventh century, sought investiture from a caliphal office three centuries older than their arrival and militarily helpless. William of Normandy, having won England on a battlefield, took his crown from a church older than his duchy. The Mamluks — slave soldiers who seized Egypt in 1250 — sent men into the desert to find a survivor of the massacre of the Baghdad caliphs hiding among Bedouin, installed him in Cairo as caliph, and maintained that office for two hundred and fifty-six years. Kublai Khan, ruler of the largest contiguous land empire in history, imported a Tibetan abbot. Even the American constitutional order, which looks like the clearest case of deliberate construction available anywhere, was assembled out of English common law, colonial charters, and a vocabulary of natural right that no delegate at Philadelphia invented.

The second half is equally well documented and rather more surprising. Diocletian, who reorganised the Roman state more thoroughly than anyone since Augustus, sacralised his own person and founded nothing that outlived his abdication. Ahmad Shah Durrani built an Afghan empire on a tribal assembly that any chief could convene, which is exactly why it bound nobody after him. Henry VIII made himself Supreme Head of the Church in England and his own daughter quietly demoted the title. And the sharpest instance is Akbar, the Mughal emperor, who had every advantage a manufacturer of legitimacy could ask for — no rival authority in his territory, a large army, a functioning bureaucracy, a court theologian supplying a doctrine of divine light and a poet to versify it — and whose decisive document of 1579 turns out, on inspection, not to be a command issued by the emperor at all but an attestation in which other men declare that his judgement binds them. A ruler with total capacity could not author his own title. The failure shows up in the grammar of the document.

So the regularity is real, and the origin line of this project exists to explain it. The explanation, compressed to a sentence, is that the property a source of title needs — *no current claimant produced this* — is a fact about history rather than a feature of a thing, and facts about history cannot be added later, so the material must come from before the players existed and must have been made for some other purpose entirely.

**Now the solvent.**

A separate paper in this project, *The Filter*, argues that the recurrence of the same structures across unconnected civilisations is neither diffusion nor a law of history but **selection**. History sieves foundings by whether they hold together, keeps the few that do, and the surviving record is therefore a record of survivors. Orders that failed early did not build archives, did not commission chronicles, did not train scribes, and did not leave a version of events. What we call the historical record of state formation is, on this reading, the set of attempts that worked, curated by themselves.

The author's own statement of it is blunter and better: *we have a record of the ones who found a way that worked; we don't have records of the failures.*

Put the regularity and the solvent in the same room — which, as far as I can establish, has never been done — and the situation is worse than either paper admits.

If the sample is survivors only, then "every anchor was inherited, none was built" is **exactly what one would observe in a world where sources of title are built constantly and only the ones that successfully concealed their construction lasted long enough to be recorded.** The two hypotheses predict identical archives. The origin paper flags this in its own weaknesses section and calls it the most serious open question in the paper, which is honest, and then proceeds anyway, which is not sufficient.

And the problem does not stop at the origin account. Run the same solvent over the rest of the corpus and watch what dissolves. *Armed men uphold settlements because a shared source converts private grievance into public forecast* — or because the orders where that mechanism failed left nobody to tell us. *Position affords few good moves, so history rhymes* — or because the men who took other moves are invisible, and what looks like a narrow set of viable options is a narrow set of recorded ones. *The interpreter's credential determines the order's characteristic fragility* — or the credential types visible in the taxonomy are simply the credential types that generate record-keeping institutions. Every finding in this project is exposed to the same reading, and until that is addressed, the corpus is a very careful description of a biased sample.

This paper therefore holds that **the origin account cannot be completed; it can only be made testable.** What follows does the synthesis first, because one cannot test an argument that has not been stated cleanly; then breaks the synthesis at its weakest

joint and repairs it; then turns the solvent on everything including the repair; then builds the instruments; and then uses one.

# The framework, compressed

*Possession, ownership, and why the strongest man cannot author his own title.*

Everything that follows rests on a distinction ordinary speech collapses. It has to be separated and kept separated, because almost every confusion in this subject comes from letting the two words drift back together.

**Possession** is what force holds now. Nobody currently able to take a thing is taking it. Possession is entirely present-tense, and it expires exactly when the capacity sustaining it expires — which means at illness, at absence, at the moment attention turns elsewhere, and completely at death.

**Ownership** is a claim about the future and about other people. To own a field is to claim it will be mine tomorrow while I sleep, mine next spring while I am away at war, mine when I am not standing on it, and — the decisive part — that when I die you will treat my son as its owner. Ownership is not a relation between a person and a thing at all. It is a structure of expectations about how other people will behave toward a thing across time, including across my absence and my death.

Force is sovereign over the first and impotent over precisely the second. A sword takes a field today. It cannot promise the field next spring, and it certainly cannot promise that a boy will hold it. **The part of a holding that force cannot reach is exactly the part that distinguishes ownership from possession, and it therefore has to be manufactured out of something that is not force.**

Read "a holding" broadly. The thing whose persistence must be manufactured need not be property in land. It can be an office, a rank, a right to labour, a standing, a claim to a title. The Inca ran an empire of millions with almost no private property in land — the mass owed labour rather than rent and owned nothing to hold title to — and the analysis applies in full, because what needed securing was the future tense of a claim. This matters more than it sounds, because the case worked at length later in this paper concerns a people with very little fixed property and a great deal to settle.

## Why the armed cannot settle without help

Consider a world of armed men holding only by force. Everybody in it would prefer a settlement; the fighting is exhausting and unprofitable. That much is obvious and it

explains nothing, because the question is not why they would like to settle but why any particular settlement holds at the moment when breaking it would pay.

The political scientist James Fearon set out the underlying difficulty in 1995, in an argument about why rational parties fight wars they would both prefer to avoid. One of his answers is what is now called the **commitment problem**, and it is simply this: nobody can bind their future self. A bargain struck at today's balance of strength will be renegotiated at tomorrow's, and if I expect to be weaker next year, an agreement made this year is a promise my future counterpart has no reason to keep. Under those conditions striking first is frequently the correct move even for a party who sincerely wants peace. This is the engine of warlordism, and no amount of goodwill touches it.

Now take the decision that actually governs. One armed man considers seizing his neighbour's holding. Strip out conscience entirely; it is not doing the work here. His decision is a **forecast about third parties** — the other houses who will watch. If they stand aside, the fight is one against one and he probably wins. If some join him, better. If they all fall on him, he is destroyed.

So look at the bystanders' problem, which is the harder one and the one that decides everything. Each bystander asks: *is this my quarrel?* Absent some common ground of title, the honest answer is no. My neighbour's holding is his affair. Spending my men on his defence buys me casualties and an enemy — and worse, if I intervene and the others do not, I have made myself the next target while they husbanded their strength. So every bystander waits. And each knows the others are reasoning identically, and that shared expectation of inaction is precisely what makes the original grab safe.

**Warlordism is therefore not a moral failure but a coordination failure among the men who might have punished it.** Predation is safe because punishment is unreliable, and punishment is unreliable because no bystander can count on the others.

## What the anchor does

Now suppose every house's holding derives its rightfulness from the same source. The bystander's arithmetic inverts. Letting this seizure stand establishes that holdings may be taken, which is a fact about *his* holding too. Intervention becomes self-defence at one remove. And — this is the load-bearing part — he can predict that the others are computing the same thing, so acting does not expose him. He is joining a coalition that forms whether or not he leads it.

Call that shared source the **anchor**. Its work is performed on the bystanders' expectations; it reaches the aggressor only as a forecast he cannot beat. He abstains not because he believes but because he can count.

The economist Barry Weingast formalised this structure in 1997, at the vertical level — the policing of rights as a coordination problem among citizens facing a ruler, where a sovereign needs only one group's acquiescence, so that divided subjects are transgressed at will and united subjects are not. Constitutions, in his account, work by defining what counts as a transgression, giving everyone a shared signal about when to act. This project applies the same structure *horizontally*, among armed peers rather than between ruler and ruled. The mechanism is Weingast's; the horizontal application is what the project adds, and it is the pivot on which the rest of this paper turns.

## The requirement, and the four properties

From which follows the requirement that organises everything. **A party competing for the spoils cannot be the author of who gets them.** A title granted by a competitor is not a title; it is a forecast about that competitor's health. And the danger is not primarily that a strong man will *break* the rule — breaking is legible, the coalition is trained to punish it, and the punishment is foreseeable enough to deter. The danger is that he will *change* it, because rule-change does not trigger the coalition. The bystander mechanism is keyed to violations of the ground and has nothing whatever to say about a man who alters the ground lawfully.

So the source must be beyond revision by the men competing. Placing it outside the human world altogether is the surest way, but it is a means and not the thing itself. **An anchor need only be unforgeable by the current claimants.** Timur could conquer from Delhi to Ankara and could not make himself a descendant of Genghis Khan. No Ethiopian noble could make himself a Solomonid. A bloodline sits squarely inside the human world and is still unrevisable, because descent is the one thing conquest cannot confer.

A working anchor needs four properties. It must be **determinate** — yielding exactly one answer to who rightfully holds this and one to who comes next, since a ground that yields two answers is not a ground but a casus belli with citations. It must be **unrevisable by any competitor**. It must be **common knowledge**, meaning not merely that everyone knows it but that everyone knows the others know it, and knows they know he knows. And it must be **attached to the office rather than the man**, or it dies at a funeral among armed heirs.

Nothing on that list requires a god. Imperial China reached all four with an impersonal Heaven, a dead sage's closed canon and a correlative cosmology. Venice reached them with a randomised electoral procedure. Ethiopia reached them with a bloodline. The supernatural was never the variable; unforgeability was.

The third property is manufactured rather than found, and it is worth saying how, because it will matter later. The political scientist Michael Chwe argued in 2001 that public ceremony solves a specific problem: coordination requires not just that everyone know something but that everyone know that everyone knows it, upward without limit. A ritual works not because it transmits a message to each person but because it lets each person *see everyone else receiving it*. A coronation before assembled magnates is a machine for producing common knowledge, and its content matters far less than the fact that everybody watched everybody watch.

## The floor, and the two audiences

An anchor says who is right. It does not enforce itself. The **floor** is the coercive capacity that makes a verdict land on the man who defies it. An anchor without a floor produces verdicts that fall still-born; a floor without an anchor produces verdicts that expire with the army. Most orders run a centralised floor; a few run a distributed one, in which the bystander coalition does the enforcing itself rather than delegating to a state, and those work only under rough equality and fail when private power concentrates. Score the two separately in every case: an intact anchor above a dissolved floor is inert, and a floor with nothing above it is a warlord with good logistics.

Finally, a legitimating story addresses two audiences, and they are not running the same program. For the **armed and administrative few**, binding requires only the expectation that the others will act on it: a baron who privately regards the coronation as theatre still cannot profit from attacking his neighbour, provided he expects the other barons to treat that attack as an assault on their own titles. His scepticism is irrelevant, because his behaviour tracks his forecast of them rather than his estimate of the doctrine's truth. And they may all be equally sceptical, and nothing changes, so long as none can be certain the others share it. For the **mass**, the traditional statement in this project has been that genuine belief is what makes rule cheap, since a peasant who privately regards the arrangement as robbery pays only when a soldier is near, and that is the expensive arrangement the whole apparatus exists to avoid.

That second claim requires an amendment which this paper is the first to record, because it was forced by a case discussed while the paper was being planned. The Ottoman order governed Christian and Jewish majorities for centuries without any expectation that they would hold the ruling creed, and it ran cheaply. It did so by **leasing** the belief it had not manufactured: leaving the Orthodox, Armenian and Jewish hierarchies alive, self-governing, taxing and judging their own, in exchange for revenue and quiet. Which yields the corrected statement:

> *The ruler's anchor must author title among the armed. The mass requires an anchor — not necessarily his. Where a subject population arrives with one already, a ruler may lease it, and the lease is cheaper than conversion.*

This matters for what follows, because it establishes that the two functions of a legitimating apparatus are separable in practice and not merely in analysis. The correction at the centre of this paper shows they are separable in a second and more consequential way.

# Part I — Three papers, one machine

*A vulnerability in the mind, a position it builds, and the thing that sits in it.*

Three papers in this project were written to answer different questions and turn out to describe one structure. Assembling them is the first job, and each is built here from the ground up so that no prior reading is required.

## The mind that has to trust

Start with something small enough to see whole. In a devout Catholic household a priest arrives, and what he says about God and the sacraments and how a life should be lived is received as the word of the Church. Ask the family what they know about this particular man — his learning, his theology, his private conduct, whether his judgement is sound — and the answer is almost always nothing. They have not examined him and it would not occur to them to try. He wears the collar. Send a different priest tomorrow, a complete stranger, and the same deference attaches instantly and undiminished, because it was never about the first man.

The lazy reading of this is that people are credulous. The lazy reading is wrong, and getting it right is the whole point.

Humans are what the cultural-evolution literature associated with Joseph Henrich calls **obligate social learners**. Our species does not succeed by individual cleverness; almost nothing any person knows was worked out by that person. We survive by acquiring, from other people, a vast body of technique and knowledge we could not reconstruct and mostly cannot check — which plants are poisonous, how to build a kayak, how to detoxify a bitter root through a fourteen-stage process no individual could have derived. The capacity to take things on trust is not a bug bolted onto an otherwise rational animal. It is the adaptation that made us dominant, which is exactly why it cannot be removed.

But we are not blank credulity either, and the correction matters. The cognitive scientists Dan Sperber and Hugo Mercier describe what they call **open vigilance**: people accept information *conditionally*, running a set of filters more or less automatically. Does the source have relevant **competence**? Does it have **benevolence** — an interest in my going right rather than wrong? Is there **consensus**, do others accept it? Is it **coherent** with what I already hold? And has the source made a **costly**

**commitment**, staked something on it that a liar would not stake? These are decent filters. In a small world they are close to unimprovable, because in a band of a hundred and fifty people the man who claims competence is the man whose competence you have watched for thirty years, and the man who claims benevolence is your cousin.

**The filters are the attack surface.** They read cues, and at civilisational scale the cue and the thing it signals come apart. Nobody can verify the competence of a bishop, a physician, a central banker or a general; what can be verified is that he holds the marks — the collar, the credential, the office, the endorsement of others who hold marks. So the cues become forgeable, and a governing class discovers, by trial and error across generations rather than by conspiracy, how to manufacture them.

The paper that develops this in the project is *The Exploit*, and its central finding is the one people resist: **seeing through is not getting out.** The framework any person is raised in is revisable, and plenty of people revise it. But the architecture is the division of cognitive labour, and no one knows more than a sliver of anything first-hand. To reject one authority is necessarily to trust another — a different scholar, a different tradition, a different network of people who seem to know. The permanence lies in the dependence, not in any rigidity of mind. The only liberty available is not the end of dependence but its *contestability*: whether the authorities one must trust are plural, checkable, revisable and in competition with each other.

## The position that specialisation builds

Now the same fact from the outside.

Adam Smith opened *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776 with the division of labour — the pin factory, where ten men who each perform one operation produce thousands of times what ten men each making whole pins could manage. That move is the foundation of material civilisation. Smith also, much later in the same book, recorded a dark second thought that is usually left out of the summary: the man whose whole life is spent performing a few simple operations has no occasion to exert his understanding, and becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become. Specialisation of doing is also specialisation of knowing, and Smith saw both halves.

Friedrich Hayek pushed this further in 1945, arguing that the knowledge a society runs on exists nowhere in complete form — it is dispersed in fragments among millions of people, and no single mind holds it or could. He meant it as an argument about economic planning. Treated as a permanent cognitive condition rather than a market curiosity, it says something larger: in any society past a certain complexity, **every person must delegate most of his knowing to sources he cannot check.**

Put those two together and a *position* comes into existence, whether or not anyone intends it. Between the many and the knowledge they cannot reach for themselves, there is a chokepoint, and somebody occupies it. Priests, scribes, jurists, scholars, editors, credentialed experts, ranking algorithms: the occupants change and the seat does not. The project's paper on this, *The Necessary Seam*, calls the position the **seam**, and makes three claims about it.

First, the seam controls **two valves**: the inflow that fills a head with the authorised account, and the outflow that starves it of the rival — formation and suppression, the catechism and the censor. Second, it has been acknowledged from the inside for as long as there have been occupants; Plato's noble lie is a description of the seat written by a man sitting in it, and Walter Lippmann's 1922 observation that the official is inevitably in some degree a censor is the same admission in modern dress. Lippmann's larger point is worth keeping in view: what people act on is not the world but the **pictures in their heads**, assembled from reports they cannot verify, and whoever shapes the reports shapes the acting.

Third, and this is the claim that will cause trouble shortly: **a position carrying structural power of that kind is, eventually, always captured.** Not by conspiracy — by gradient. It is simply worth more to control than to leave alone, and over a long enough period somebody with resources acts on that.

And the seam does not go away. Every new information technology is greeted as its abolition and merely relocates it: scribe to priest to printer to editor to algorithm. The seam is made of *finitude*, and no technology repeals finitude. A flood of information does not dissolve the chokepoint; it builds a new one, because when there is more than anyone can read, the filter becomes the power.

## The joint

Now put the three papers together, and the architecture states itself.

**The seam is the position. The interpreter class is the occupant. The anchor is the content. And open vigilance is why any of it holds.**

The origin paper, *The Found Ground*, says that an anchor "lives in the gap" that specialisation opens between the men who hold the meanings and the men who hold the weapons — that it is a relationship rather than a thing, belonging to neither party. What the other two papers supply is *why the gap exists at all* (specialisation divides knowing, so a chokepoint is structurally unavoidable in any complex society) and *why its content is believed* (a mind that must delegate reads cues, and cues are readable).

One further consequence of the joint is worth extracting, because it accounts for something the project has recorded many times without explaining: **age is the**

**strongest possible signal against every vigilance criterion at once.** An old cosmology passes on competence, because it has been sufficient for generations. It passes on consensus, because everyone around you holds it. It passes on coherence, because everything else you know was built inside it. And it passes on costly commitment, because people have died for it within living memory. A new claim fails on all four simultaneously, and there is no way to make a new claim pass except by asserting that it is not new.

This is not a rhetorical preference of founders. It is the filter operating, and it explains why every new ground in the record is announced as a **recovery** — Hilkiah's scroll discovered in the Temple during renovations in 622 BCE, at a moment of political need, containing a law nobody had been keeping; Marx's *discovered* law of historical development; the nationalist awakening of a people that had supposedly been there all along and merely asleep. Three instances, twenty-five centuries apart, with no transmission between them, all reaching for the identical move. When we come to the failed case worked at the end of this paper, the only surviving native account of it will turn out to be written in exactly this grammar, by a successor order, a hundred and fifty years later.

# Part II — The contradiction at the joint

*What happens when the seam paper and the origin paper are asked the same question.*

The synthesis just assembled is tidy, and tidiness in this project is a warning sign. Press the joint and it comes apart.

Two of the three papers make claims about what happens to the interpreter class, and combined, the claims are incompatible with the record.

*The Necessary Seam* holds that a position carrying structural power of this kind is **eventually always captured**. Nothing in this project's case material contradicts that; the studies are full of it. Rulers fund the interpreters, house them, license them, appoint their head, set their examination, starve them where the funding is terminable, and attack their standing by publicity where it is not.

*The Found Ground* holds that the anchor lives in the gap between meaning-holders and weapon-holders, and therefore **dies when the gap closes from either side** — whether a ruler captures the interpreters or the interpreters raise an army of their own.

Put those together and the stack predicts that every anchor is on a short clock, and that orders should characteristically die of interpreter capture.

**The record says otherwise, loudly, in at least three places.**

The Ottoman religious establishment was about as captured as an interpretive class can be. Its senior office, the *şeyhülislam*, was appointed and dismissed by the sultan. Its scholars drew state salaries, its colleges were state-endowed, and its internal hierarchy of ranks was administered from the palace. By the seam paper's logic the anchor should have been dead water within a generation. The Ottoman order ran, in one form or another, for roughly six centuries.

Imperial China is worse for the thesis, because the capture there was not merely of the men but of the credential itself. The Chinese interpretive class was constituted by an **examination set by the state** — which is the most completely capturable credential in the entire taxonomy, since the ruler determines both the syllabus and the pass list, and can therefore determine not only who interprets but what counts as competent interpretation. And imperial China is the longest-running instance in this project's whole archive.

England after 1534 is a third case, in miniature and at speed. Henry VIII made himself head of the church, which is capture in its most naked available form, and the English order did not dissolve into warlordism, did not lose its aristocracy's

coordination, and went on within two centuries to build the most durable constitutional settlement in Europe.

So one of two things is true. Either the seam paper is wrong that capture is universal, or the origin paper is wrong that capture kills the anchor. I think the origin paper is wrong, and the error is not small, because correcting it produces a distinction the case studies have been circling for years without stating.

The error is that **"the interpreter class" names one group of people doing two entirely different jobs**, and the two jobs have opposite exposure to capture.

# Part III — The two jobs of the interpreter

*Vertical and horizontal, why only one of them dies, and what the difference costs.*

Here is the distinction, stated plainly before it is worked.

**The vertical job is telling the apex no.** It is the function by which an interpretive authority constrains the man at the top: refusing him a divorce, excommunicating him, declaring a war unjust, denying a tax, withholding a coronation, pronouncing a succession invalid. It is the function everyone thinks of when they think of religious authority checking royal power, and it supplies all the dramatic scenes.

**The horizontal job is making every armed man's title checkable against one source.** It is the function by which a baron's holding, an emir's land grant, a governor's commission and a magnate's immunity all derive from the same place, so that an attack on any of them registers with all the others as an attack on the ground beneath their own. It is silent, it is unremarkable, it generates no anecdotes, and it is the function on which the settlement described in the compressed framework actually depends.

**Capture destroys the vertical job almost immediately. It leaves the horizontal job entirely intact.**

The reason is structural rather than incidental, and it is worth being precise about. A bought interpreter cannot tell the ruler no, because the ruler holds his living, his rank, his colleagues' promotions and his successor's appointment; the refusal that matters is the one that costs, and a salaried man's refusal costs him rather than the ruler. But a bought interpreter can perform the horizontal function perfectly, because that function requires nothing whatever from him except that he continue to be **the single place titles come from**. He need not be brave. He need not be independent. He need not even be respected. He need only be *singular*. A sultan's servile jurist, drawing a state salary and holding office at the sultan's pleasure, still makes it the case that every emir's grant of land derives from the same source as every other emir's — which is the entirety of what the bystander mechanism requires.

Put it as a formula: **the vertical function requires the interpreter to be independent of the ruler; the horizontal function requires only that he be common to the ruled.** Capture removes the first condition and does not touch the second.

Run this over the cases and a pattern that has looked like noise resolves into something regular.

## The Ottoman case: capture without collapse

The Ottoman religious establishment illustrates the split cleanly because the capture was thorough and the horizontal function is documented in the ordinary administrative record rather than in the dramatic one.

On the vertical side, the record is close to empty, and its emptiness is the finding. There is no Ottoman Canossa. There is no *şeyhülislam* who denied a sultan a marriage and made it stick against his will, no interdict, no sustained institutional refusal of a war or a tax. Jurists issued opinions that mattered, and they mattered when they aligned with a faction at court or with the corps of soldiers; the office was a card in a palace game rather than an independent bench. That is exactly what the seam paper predicts of a captured position and it is exactly what happened.

On the horizontal side, nothing failed. The *timar* system — grants of revenue from land, made to cavalrymen in return for service — ran on the proposition that the grant came from the sultan's authority within a legal order that the jurists maintained and that everyone acknowledged. A holder of such a grant did not need his jurist to be brave. He needed the ground under his grant to be the same ground under every other holder's grant, so that a seizure of his revenues by a rival would register with all the others as an attack on the principle beneath their own. Capture left that undisturbed for centuries, and the order's eventual troubles came from somewhere else entirely: from grants becoming heritable, from tax-farming producing local magnates with independent bases, from a soldiery that acquired property and lineages. Those are second-author problems, not interpreter problems, and the framework names them as such.

## The Chinese case: the credential itself was state property

Imperial China pushes the point further, because there the ruler did not merely appoint the interpreters — he defined the qualification.

An examination system in which the state sets the curriculum, sets the questions and determines the pass list is a machine for producing an interpretive class that cannot be independent of the state, because independence would require a standard of competence the state did not author. And indeed the vertical function in imperial China is thin in exactly the predicted way. There were remonstrating officials, there were censors, there were scholars who died for objecting — and their objections were

framed as *loyal instruction to a ruler who had departed from the classics*, which is the vocabulary of a servant, not of an independent bench holding a credential the ruler cannot revoke. The tradition produced heroic individual refusals and no institutional capacity to compel.

And yet the horizontal function worked at a scale nothing else in the record matches. Office was not inheritable. Officials were rotated. Service in one's home district was forbidden. Which means that essentially the entire administrative elite of the empire held its standing from a single source and could not convert that standing into an independent, heritable base — and that is the sole-authorship condition satisfied about as completely as a large agrarian state can satisfy it. The interpretive credential was maximally captured; single authorship of title was maximally intact; the order was the longest-running in the archive. Those three facts are only compatible if the two jobs are separable, which is the claim.

## The control case: the Investiture Contest, and what a live vertical function looks like

The distinction would be suspiciously convenient if the vertical function never appeared anywhere. It does appear, and where it appears it has a specific and identifiable cause, which is what makes it a control rather than an exception.

Between roughly 1075 and 1122, the papacy and the German emperors fought a long constitutional war over who appointed bishops — a conflict that produced, in January 1077, the scene at Canossa in which an emperor waited in the snow outside a castle for absolution from a pope. Nothing remotely comparable occurred in the Ottoman or Chinese cases. Why not?

Not because Latin churchmen were braver or holier. Because the credential in Latin Christendom lived in a **foreign office**. The pope was outside every individual king's reach — not appointable by any of them, not salaried by any of them, not removable by any of them, and possessed of an income and an institutional base that no single monarch controlled. The vertical function was live in Latin Christendom precisely because capture was structurally unavailable to any one claimant, and the Investiture Contest is what a live vertical function looks like when it collides with a ruler.

The point generalises across the corpus, and once seen it is visible everywhere. The head of the Ethiopian church was appointed from Alexandria and sent from Egypt for something close to sixteen centuries — a foreign appointee, not a subject, structurally uncapturable by any Ethiopian emperor in a way no bishop of a national church has

ever been. Ethiopia accordingly has a record of clerical resistance to emperors that a national-church order simply does not generate.

**National churches do not produce Canossas.** That is not a moral observation about national churches. It is a statement about where a credential lives, and it is checkable in advance of knowing any outcomes.

## The extreme case: an interpreter with no floor at all

The Abbasid caliph under the Buyids and Seljuks is the limiting instance, and it demonstrates the separation of the two jobs more sharply than anything else in the record.

By the middle of the eleventh century the caliph in Baghdad had no army, no treasury worth the name, and no capacity to compel anyone to do anything. Turkish sultans who had conquered the region by force nonetheless sought investiture from him, and the office was kept alive for centuries. On the vertical axis this is zero: the caliph could not tell a Seljuk sultan anything and be obeyed. On the horizontal axis it is at full strength, because the investiture is precisely what made a Turkish chieftain's distribution of land and command among his emirs something other than one nomad warlord's personal favour to another. The emir held from the sultan, the sultan held from the caliph, and the caliph held from nobody in the contest — so the chain terminated somewhere no competitor could seize.

And the project has already paid for the corollary, which is one of the most useful things it has established: the Abbasid caliphate was destroyed within seventeen years of the one occasion on which it raised an army of its own. **A source of title that acquires a floor becomes a competitor, and a competitor's word is worth his army.** Powerlessness is not the puzzle to be explained away; it is the qualification. An interpreter who can enforce is a claimant, and a claimant cannot author.

## The corrected statement, and where orders actually die

So the origin paper's claim should be restated:

> *The anchor lives in the gap. Closing the gap from the ruler's side destroys the interpreter's capacity to constrain him and leaves untouched the interpreter's capacity to coordinate them. An order therefore does not die of a bought priest. It dies when a second author of title appears.*

That last clause names the actual failure mode, and it deserves to be spelled out, because it is where the framework earns its keep and because the case worked later in this paper fails by a variant of it.

The lethal event is not that the clergy became servile. It is that somebody *other than the anchor* acquired the power to grant holdings that outlast the grant. Rome's legions held title from the civic order and no commander could add to it; after Marius a general could grant land to his veterans, and every subsequent threat to the Republic came through that channel. Medieval Europe ran subinfeudation, with title flowing *through* intermediate lords rather than from a single source, and delivered exactly what the mechanism predicts: weak monarchy, endemic baronial war, and centuries of expensive institutional effort — liege homage, royal courts, the doctrine that all land is ultimately held of the crown — spent restoring single authorship.

The mechanism of the failure is worth stating precisely, because it is not simple disloyalty. A magnate whose lands come from a patron rather than from the anchor has only a *conditional* interest in the anchor's integrity. If his patron moves against the settlement, his rational course is to follow, because his title travels with his patron. He is not defecting from the bystander coalition. He was never fully inside it. And every man in his position computes identically, which means the patron does not face the coalition — he brings a piece of it with him.

## The trade nobody refuses

Which yields the trade the case material has been showing all along without a name for it.

Capturing the interpreters buys a ruler real and immediate goods: no excommunications, no denied taxes, no inconvenient verdicts, no rival institution with an independent income and a claim on his subjects' consciences. It costs him nothing in stability during his own lifetime, and the framework can now say why — because the function it destroys is not the function that holds the settlement together.

What it costs is the only mechanism that could have restrained his successors, and what it produces over the long run is an order with no internal capacity to tell its own apex that he is wrong. The project's most recent volume found the same shape in different material: an authority's exposure scales with how often it must be consulted, so that control and fragility are purchased with a single lever. This is that lever again, running on the vertical axis. **A ruler who captures his interpreters is not making a mistake. He is making a trade whose bill falls due after his death**, which is the class of trade that human institutions are worst at declining, and the reason the capture is as universal as the seam paper says.

# Part IV — Where the ground comes from

*Exaptation, the three conditions, and why the regress terminates in something that is not an anchor.*

With the correction in hand, the origin argument can be stated properly.

## The property cannot be added

The requirement, again, is that the source of title be unforgeable by the men currently competing. Notice what kind of requirement that is. It is not a *feature* of an object — not a design specification that a sufficiently well-resourced builder could meet. It is a **fact about the object's history**.

A ruler with unlimited means can build the temple, endow the priesthood, commission the scripture, train the interpreters, compose the liturgy and stage the coronation. What he cannot do is make it true that he did not do those things. And every witness to the building retains, permanently, the one observation that destroys the instrument: *I watched him make it*. The property he needs is the absence of exactly the act he is performing, which is why the harder he works the worse his position becomes.

That is why Akbar's document of 1579 is an attestation rather than a command, and why the failure is legible in the grammar. Given the choice between issuing an order and getting other men to sign a statement that his judgement binds them, an emperor with an army chose the second, because the first would have carried his own signature and been worth exactly his own strength. The most powerful man in South Asia needed somebody else's handwriting.

## The material was made for something else

If the property cannot be conferred, the material has to come from outside the contest, and the general route is temporal: from before the players existed.

Biology has a precise term for this. In 1982 the palaeontologists Stephen Jay Gould and Elisabeth Vrba proposed **exaptation** for a feature that arises under one set of pressures and is later co-opted for a use it did not evolve to serve. The standard illustration is feathers. Feathers long predate flying birds and appear to have served

insulation and display; flight came along afterwards and made use of what was lying around. Flight did not *cause* feathers. Flight *found* them.

The parallel is exact and it is the paper's central image. Asking who made the first source of political legitimacy is malformed in the same way that asking what the first flight feather evolved *for* is malformed. Nobody made it. Cosmologies existed, doing other things — explaining the flood, fixing the calendar, ordering marriage, burying the dead, settling quarrels between neighbours — and the commitment problem found them.

From which follows the finding most likely to be contested and which I think is right: **sincerity is the manufacturing process.** A body of belief becomes authorless because it accretes across generations out of genuine attempts to understand and order the world, revised by nobody in particular, attributed to no one. That process is the only known way to produce a thing with no author, and it *cannot be run on purpose*, because running it on purpose is precisely what disqualifies the output.

And therefore: **cynicism is parasitic on prior sincerity.** An instrumental elite can capture an anchor, staff it, fund it, defend it and live off it for centuries — this project has said so repeatedly and it stands. What such an elite cannot do is make one, because making one requires not being about power. Every cynical order is drawing down a stock of authorlessness produced generations earlier by people who meant it. Belief, on this account, is a non-renewable input manufactured by a process nobody controls.

## Three conditions turn material into anchor

Raw authorless material is necessary and not sufficient. Three further conditions have to hold, and their absence will do real diagnostic work later in this paper.

**Specialisation opens the gap.** Surplus permits some people to stop farming, and among the first non-farmers are those who fight and those who interpret. The separation of those two occupations is what makes an anchor possible, because the anchor lives between them and belongs to neither. Where the two occupations are not separated — where the man who commands is also the man who reads the will of heaven — there is no gap for an anchor to live in, and the consequences are severe.

**Conditional trust makes age the evidence.** This is Part I's vigilance argument doing origin work: an old cosmology passes every filter automatically and a new one fails nearly all of them, so the only material that can pass is material that has been lying around long enough for nobody to remember its arrival.

**Circumscription closes the exit.** In 1970 the anthropologist Robert Carneiro published a theory of state origins turning on a simple observation. Warfare is universal; states are not. What distinguishes the places where war produced states from

the places where it did not is whether the losers could *leave*. In the narrow Peruvian coastal valleys, hemmed by desert, mountain and sea, a defeated village had nowhere to go, so it was absorbed and subordinated rather than dispersed, and hierarchy became possible. In the Amazon basin, where beaten groups simply moved into effectively unlimited forest, the same warfare produced no states for millennia. Carneiro's argument has been criticised since, and fairly, but the core point survives: **where the defeated can walk away, there is nothing to settle, because dispersal is cheaper than subordination for everyone involved.**

To which this project adds an extension that is the author's rather than Carneiro's and that deserves separate statement: **legal circumscription.** Where geography supplies no walls, states build them in statute. Serfdom, the late Roman colonate binding cultivators to their estates, and household-registration systems that make an unregistered person legally nowhere are all instruments for producing, by law, the condition Carneiro found in geography — a population that cannot leave. The prediction is that legal binding should appear disproportionately where natural boundaries are absent, and should accompany rather than long postdate consolidation.

## Where the regress stops

The obvious objection to all of this is that it defers rather than explains. If every anchor is inherited from an earlier one, either there was a first that somebody made — in which case anchors can be made — or the chain runs back forever, which is absurd.

The answer is the payoff of the exaptation frame. **The chain does not run back through anchors. It terminates in something that is not one.** There was never a first anchor; there was a first *repurposing*. What lies at the base is not a proto-anchor but a cosmology that authorised no distribution of holdings and would not have been recognised by its makers as having anything to do with title. It required no political ancestor because it was not doing political work.

Two consequences are worth stating separately. The first is that "where do anchors come from" is not a question about political invention at all; it is a question about what a society happens to have accumulated, for other reasons, by the time it acquires a coordination problem it cannot solve. The real determinants of an order's foundations are largely **pre-political**, laid down by people with no political intention centuries before anybody needed them.

The second is more uncomfortable. If the raw material is produced only by processes nobody is running, it cannot be produced to order — including now. Any project of deliberately constructing a shared source of title between states, above states, for a world with no cosmology in common, is attempting the thing the record contains

no clear instance of. That is not a proof of impossibility. It is a statement about the odds, and about where the difficulty actually lies: not in designing the instrument, but in the fact that the required property is a fact about origins and cannot be conferred by design.

## The strongest objection, and the honest retreat

There is one large body of evidence against all of this, and it should be stated at full strength rather than managed.

Modern nationalism looks very much like an anchor built from nothing, by identifiable people, on datable occasions, within living memory of its own construction — and it became load-bearing enough that tens of millions of people died for it.

Two works of 1983 established the case. The historian Eric Hobsbawm and the anthropologist Terence Ranger edited *The Invention of Tradition*, demonstrating that a striking number of practices presented as immemorial were recent and deliberate — national ceremonies, ancient-looking uniforms, folk costume, royal pageantry assumed to be centuries old and in fact assembled in the nineteenth century for identifiable purposes. In the same year the political scientist Benedict Anderson published *Imagined Communities*, arguing that a nation is a community its members imagine into being — none of them will ever meet more than a fraction of their compatriots, yet each holds a picture of a horizontal fellowship — and that this became thinkable through specific datable technologies, above all printing in vernacular languages, which let dispersed strangers read the same things at the same time and thereby recognise one another as a public.

If both are right, a source of collective political rightfulness was manufactured in the modern period by people whose names we know, and it worked spectacularly. That would falsify the argument above.

The weakest response — that nationalism is not an anchor because it does not authorise particular holdings — is wrong and should be discarded. Nationalism authorises the most fundamental holding of all, a state's claim to a territory and a population, and it does so in exactly the framework's manner, by making an attack on any national title an attack on the principle beneath all of them.

A stronger response is that the *material* was not invented. What the nineteenth-century nation-builders assembled was made of things they did not make: languages spoken for centuries, peasant custom, folk memory, religious identity, landscape, and a documented history that was selected and dramatised rather than fabricated. Hobsbawm's own analysis is that invented traditions typically *attach themselves* to a suitable historic past, which concedes the essential point.

The strongest response concerns the form the invention was compelled to take. Nationalist movements did not present themselves as creating nations. They presented themselves as **awakening** them. The vocabulary is consistently that of recovery, revival, resurrection — a sleeping people restored to consciousness of what it had always been. Nobody announced that they were constructing a new people and a new claim. That is the vigilance filter of Part I operating exactly as described, and **the fact that the claim was compelled to assert antiquity is itself a confession that antiquity is the load-bearing property.**

But this is a partial save and not a refutation, and the honest version of the thesis is the weaker one:

> *The raw material of an anchor cannot be manufactured. Its **assembly** can be — deliberately, quickly, by known individuals — provided the assembly is presented as recovery, and provided the assembler is not the beneficiary of the distribution it authorises.*

That second proviso does real work. The philologists, folklorists, poets and historians who assembled the national traditions were overwhelmingly not the men who would rule the resulting states. The material was assembled by one set of people and used by another, which reproduces in compressed modern form exactly the separation that Part I says an anchor requires.

# Part V — The solvent

*Wald's bombers, and what happens when the project's own method is turned on the project.*

Everything to this point is an account of a sample. This part is about the sample.

In 1943 the American Statistical Research Group at Columbia University was asked a practical question. Bombers were being lost over Europe at ruinous rates; armour was heavy and could not be applied everywhere without destroying performance; where should it go? The obvious method was to examine returning aircraft, chart where they had been hit, and armour the places that showed the most damage. The statistician **Abraham Wald** produced a series of memoranda — the surviving one carries the perfectly flat title *A Method of Estimating Plane Vulnerability Based on Damage of Survivors* — establishing that this method inverts the answer. The aircraft available for inspection were, by definition, the ones that came back. Damage concentrated on the returning planes marked the places where a bomber could be hit and still fly home. The armour belonged where the returning planes showed *no* damage, because the aircraft hit there were not in the sample.

The cinematic version of this, in which Wald points at a diagram and corrects a room of generals, is a legend with no documentary support; the memoranda are real and are the actual contribution. It is worth noticing in passing that the survivorship-bias story is itself a story that survived because it was pithy, which is either a pleasing irony or a warning, and is probably both.

**Now turn it on this project.**

The corpus consists of roughly thirty orders that lasted long enough to generate records, chronicles, law codes, monuments and modern scholarship. Every single one is a returning bomber. The camps that dissolved within a decade, the confederations that came apart at the founder's funeral, the settlements that never took — none of them commissioned a chronicler, and most did not last long enough to train one.

The consequences are not confined to the origin account, and this is the part the project has not faced.

**On the origin finding.** "Every anchor was inherited; none was built" is precisely what one observes in a world where sources of title are built constantly and only the successfully-concealed constructions last long enough to be recorded. The two hypotheses are observationally identical on this evidence. What can be said either way is

narrower and still substantial: *a source of title must either be found, or must succeed completely in appearing to have been.*

**On the settlement argument.** The claim that armed men uphold arrangements because a shared source converts private grievance into public forecast is supported entirely by cases in which armed men did uphold arrangements. The cases where the same mechanism was present and failed anyway are largely invisible — and if there are many of them, the mechanism is not the operative variable.

**On the rhyme argument.** The claim that position affords few good moves, so unconnected civilisations converge on similar solutions, is exactly what one would observe if many moves were tried and only a narrow band of outcomes generated the institutions that write things down. A narrow set of *recorded* options is not a narrow set of *viable* ones.

**On the credential taxonomy.** The claim that where an interpreter's credential lives determines an order's characteristic fragility is drawn from orders whose interpreters left documents. The credential types that appear in the taxonomy may simply be the credential types that produce archives.

**And on this paper.** The vertical/horizontal distinction of Part III was derived by asking why surviving orders survived under captured clergies. It is a survivor-derived finding about survivors, and it is exposed to the objection as fully as anything else in the corpus.

I want to be exact about the size of this problem, because overstating it is as useless as ignoring it. It does not show that any of the findings are *wrong*. It shows that the corpus, as presently constituted, **cannot distinguish a finding about the world from a finding about the archive**, and that a body of work unable to make that distinction is a description rather than a theory. Wald's insight was not that the engineers were foolish. It was that the data were structurally incapable of answering the question being asked of them, and that the remedy was to go and account for the missing half.

The rest of this paper goes and accounts for the missing half.

# Part VI — The shape of the sieve

*Three instruments for seeing what fell through.*

A sieve can be characterised two ways: by examining what it caught, which is what this project has done for years, or by examining what fell through, which it has never done. The second is harder and considerably more informative. Three instruments are available, in increasing order of difficulty and of value, and they are best understood as one program rather than three options, because each supplies what the others lack.

## The first instrument: the failures are displaced, not missing

The premise that failed orders left no archive is **half true, and the false half is the useful one.**

A camp that dissolved left no archive *of its own*. But failures rarely occur in an unobserved world. They occur next to somebody, and if that somebody is literate and record-keeping, the failure is written down — in the neighbour's language, in the neighbour's categories, and for the neighbour's purposes. The record of failure is not absent. It is **displaced into the archives of the survivors next door.**

The Chinese dynastic histories are the richest instance available anywhere on earth. Chinese court historians documented the polities of the northern steppe across two millennia with an obsessiveness driven by the fact that those polities were the empire's central and permanent strategic problem. The Xiongnu confederation, the Xianbei, the Rouran, the successive Türk khaganates, the Uyghurs, the Khitan and dozens of smaller formations are known overwhelmingly through Chinese sources rather than their own. Crucially, this record includes the confederations that **came apart**, because a confederation coming apart was excellent news at the Chinese court and was reported as such, in detail, with names and dates. Here is a documented population of attempted settlements among armed men, of which a few consolidated and most did not, recorded by an outside observer who had no stake in the legitimacy of any individual attempt and every interest in tracking whether it would hold.

The Greco-Roman ethnographic and military literature offers a smaller version for Europe: Gallic, Germanic, Dacian and Thracian coalitions that formed under a leader

and did not outlive him, described by writers whose practical interest was in whether they would cohere long enough to matter.

To these can be added a category the project has overlooked entirely: **orders that did consolidate, generated records, and then failed quickly.** These are not invisible at all. The Latin Empire of Constantinople, established by crusaders in 1204 on the ruins of a functioning empire, lasted fifty-seven years. The crusader states of the Levant produced a substantial legal literature and did not survive. The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom held much of the Yangtze valley for roughly fourteen years with an elaborate, fully documented legitimating apparatus. The post-Mongol and post-Timurid splinters, and the twentieth-century secessions that failed within a decade, all left paper. A short-lived order is a failure with an archive, and there are a great many of them.

Two cautions belong inside the instrument rather than in a footnote.

**The neighbour's record is hostile and formulaic.** Chinese descriptions of steppe peoples run through a moral template about barbarian character that is doing ideological work at the Chinese court; Tacitus's Germans are substantially a mirror held up to Roman decadence rather than an ethnography. Reading these as neutral reportage reproduces the original propaganda in scholarly dress. And there is a specific hazard for this project's purposes: a Chinese historian had a standing interest in reporting that steppe confederations were inherently unstable, which is exactly the proposition a study of steppe failure would be tempted to draw from him.

**And there is a second layer of selection.** Only failures adjacent to a literate power are visible. Failures in the interior of the Amazon, the Sahel or highland New Guinea are as invisible as they ever were. The instrument narrows the bias; it does not abolish it, and no instrument will.

## The second instrument: the hostile-witness test

The origin argument's admitted weakness is that it is a search rather than a test. For any order whatever, a determined analyst can find *some* pre-existing material the founders did not invent, and having found it, declare it the source. That procedure cannot fail, and a claim that cannot fail is not a claim.

The remedy is to specify in advance what would count as manufacture. Here is a criterion that can go the wrong way, which is what makes it worth having.

> ***Did the order's enemies, at the time, attack the source of title as an innovation?***

The logic is that enemies are the ideal witnesses. A rival faction has every incentive to say *he invented this last year* if he invented it last year, and every incentive to find a different line of attack if he did not. So the *content of contemporary hostile criticism* discriminates between a found ground and a made one, using evidence that is independent of the framework's own categories.

Run it, and it behaves.

**Akbar, 1579 — manufacture, and the enemy is the archive.** The document by which the Mughal emperor became the supreme arbiter in disputed questions of Islamic law is known almost entirely through ʿAbd al-Qādir Badāʾūnī, an orthodox scholar at Akbar's own court who wrote a bitterly hostile chronicle, kept it concealed for the emperor's lifetime, and made the emperor's religious *innovations* his central charge. Modern scholarship has corrected the traditional label: the document was not a decree — a decree would have been a *farmān* — but a *maḥẓar*, an attestation by others, which is exactly the grammatical tell discussed above. Note what this instance demonstrates about method as well as content. **The hostile witness is our only detailed source.** The court chronicler passes over the affair; the enemy preserves it. Manufacture is visible in the archive precisely where somebody objected at the time.

**Henry VIII, 1534 — manufacture, and men died over the novelty.** The Supreme Headship was attacked as an innovation by its opponents, and Thomas More and John Fisher were executed in 1535 over precisely that question. The claim was demoted by Elizabeth to "Supreme Governor" within a generation.

**Diocletian — manufacture, and contemporaries saw it.** The sacralisation of the emperor's own person was recognised as a novelty at the time and outlived its author by nothing.

**Against these, the found grounds behave differently.** The Seljuk emirs of the eleventh century disputed a great many things and did not dispute that the caliphate was ancient; their quarrels concerned who should receive investiture, not whether investiture was a real thing. William of Normandy's opponents argued about whether Edward had promised him the throne and whether Harold's oath bound him — that is, they argued *inside* the ground rather than about it. **When an enemy attacks you for violating the source, he has conceded the source. When he attacks you for inventing it, he has not.**

**And now the failure case, which belongs inside the instrument rather than in a footnote.** Nationalism was widely attacked as a novelty by conservative critics throughout the nineteenth century, and it worked anyway. So either the test holds only inside a settled cosmological frame and fails when the frame itself is being replaced, or what actually carried nationalism was the second proviso of Part IV — that the

assemblers were not the beneficiaries. I do not know which, and finding out is a real research question rather than a rhetorical gesture. A test with a known failure case is still a test; a test with no known failure case is usually not a test at all.

## The third instrument: put the thirty cases in a table

This is the cheapest of the three and possibly the most valuable, and it is slightly embarrassing that it has not been done.

The project contains roughly thirty worked cases. They have never once been tabulated. Every finding in the corpus is a qualitative pattern held across studies in prose — which means the corpus can accumulate insight indefinitely without ever encountering a contradiction, because contradictions between prose studies written months apart are extremely easy not to notice.

The columns are already implicit in the diagnostics and need only be made explicit: the anchor's type (bloodline, closed canon, procedure, law, creed, appointment); whether it was inherited or minted, and if minted, by whom; where the interpreter's credential lived (office, person, family, state-set examination, foreign appointment); how the interpreters were funded (perpetual endowment, terminable grant, tax exemption, salary); whether the floor was centralised, distributed, or held from outside; whether title had a single author throughout, and the date at which any second author appeared; the succession rule's determinacy and the patches applied to it; and the classification of the ending as internal failure or external conquest.

That last column is not a formality. This project insists on it because an order killed from outside tells us nothing about whether its settlement could have survived its own contradictions, any more than a demolished building tells us about its foundations. Carthage in 146 BCE is not evidence about Punic institutions. Most comparative arguments about institutional durability quietly mix the two and thereby measure military history while believing they are measuring constitutions.

The value of a grid is not that it produces statistics; thirty cases will not support much statistics. It is that **empty cells become predictions and inconsistencies become visible.** The project has already had one taste of this: somebody noticed that crossing credential-capturability against heritability for the armed elite produces four cells of which two have no obvious historical occupant, and that observation was only sayable because a table had been half-drawn in someone's head.

The honest limit must be stated alongside the instrument. **Coding one's own cases, after the fact, in one's own categories, tests internal consistency and nothing else.** It can catch contradiction; it cannot establish that the categories carve anything real, because the categories were derived from these cases. External validity requires coding

cases the framework has never touched — which is precisely what the first instrument supplies. That is why the three are one program. The table gives the framework a shape sharp enough to be wrong; the hostile-witness test gives it a discriminator that does not presuppose it; and the displaced archives supply cases it has never seen.

Which is a description of a research programme, and a research programme that is never begun is a wish. So the next part begins it.

# Part VII — The instrument used once: an empire that lasted twenty-nine years

*The First Türk Khaganate, 552–603, read from the archives of its neighbours.*

The three instruments are now applied to a single order. The demonstration is deliberately unflattering to the framework: the case was chosen because it is a failure, because the framework has never touched it, and because it has a property the project has wanted for some time and could not find.

## Why this case

In the spring of 552 a chieftain named Bumin, of a clan called Ashina, destroyed the confederation he had served and declared himself khagan — supreme ruler — on the Mongolian steppe. Within a generation his family governed a domain that reached from Manchuria to the Black Sea, something on the order of six million square kilometres, the first transcontinental empire in the history of Central Asia. It sat astride the overland trade between China and Persia, negotiated as an equal with the Byzantine emperor and the Sasanian shah, and destroyed the Hephthalite empire in alliance with the latter.

By 581 it was in civil war among four claimants. By 603 it had divided permanently into eastern and western khaganates that thereafter treated each other as rivals. The eastern half was conquered by Tang China in 630; the western followed in the 650s.

Twenty-nine years from founding to fracture. This is what a maximal attempt at settlement looks like when it does not take, and it is exactly the sort of object the corpus does not contain.

Three properties make it the right first application.

**It is a failure with an archive.** The First Khaganate is known almost entirely through the writings of its literate neighbours. The Chinese dynastic histories — the *Zhoushu*, the *Suishu*, the *Beishi*, and later the Tang compilations — supply the chronology, the genealogy of the Ashina, the succession disputes and the diplomacy, recorded by a court for which the Türks were the central strategic problem of the age. The Byzantine record supplies the western half: the historian Menander Protector preserved the embassies that passed between Constantinople and the Türk court in the years around 569–571, including the envoy Zemarchus's journey to the western ruler.

And a third body of evidence comes from the Sogdians, the Central Asian merchant people who served the khaganate as its diplomats and scribes. This is the displacement thesis being cashed rather than asserted: a major failed settlement, densely documented, in three foreign languages.

**It is a secular order.** There was no priesthood, no scripture, no separate religious institution of any kind. The Türks held Tengri, the sky, as the source of sovereignty — the khagan reigned because heaven had enthroned him — but Tengrism at this date had no closed canon, no clergy holding a credential, and no body of interpreters distinct from the men who commanded. That matters enormously for what follows.

**And it is a fork.** The order did not merely weaken; it divided into two, each half claiming the same source of legitimacy. The project's most recent volume examined forking in an ecclesiastical setting — the Western Schism, in which two and eventually three men each claimed to be the one pope — and established several things about it, while leaving open whether the findings were about churches or about authority as such. This case is the secular control the question needed: same structure, no religion, no council, no canon law.

## What the anchor was

Run the diagnostics. The named source of rightful rule is specific and can be stated in a phrase: **descent in the Ashina clan, holding a mandate from Tengri.** Not "the sky" in general and not "Turkic custom" — the right to the title of khagan ran in one family, and that family's right came from heaven.

Score it against the four properties and the results are mixed in an instructive way.

**Unrevisable: yes, completely.** No amount of conquest could make a man Ashina. This is the same property the Solomonic and Chinggisid bloodlines have, and it is the strongest form the project has catalogued. Whatever went wrong here, forgeability was not it.

**Common knowledge: yes.** The claim was broadcast in every available register. It is worth pausing on the monument, because it makes the point better than any argument. Around 581–584 a stele was raised in the Orkhon valley for Taspar Qaghan — a wolf-crowned stone on a turtle base, invoking heaven's authority for the khagan's rule. It is called the Bugut inscription, and it is written **in Sogdian**, the language of the khaganate's merchant scribes, not in Turkic. The Türks' own monumental self-legitimation, at the height of their power, was composed in a subject people's language and script because their own had not yet been reduced to writing. The seam was staffed by foreigners.

**Attached to office or to man: neither, exactly — attached to a family.** The project's four properties treat this as a binary and the case shows it is not. A bloodline anchor is more durable than a personal one, because it survives the founder's death, and less durable than an office, because it multiplies with the family. Which brings us to the property that failed.

**Determinate: no.** The anchor specified the *lineage* and said nothing whatever about the *member*. Any Ashina could claim to hold heaven's mandate, and there was no rule — not primogeniture, not seniority, not election by a defined body, not designation binding on anyone — that selected among them.

This is the identical defect the project found in Ethiopia, where Solomonic descent was determinate about the line and silent about which of its members should reign. But Ethiopia is instructive precisely because of what it did about the gap: it imprisoned its surplus princes on a mountain for life. The severity of that patch is a measure of how large the gap was, and the patch is why the Ethiopian order ran seven centuries with the same defect. **The Türks patched nothing.** In 581, on the death of the fourth khagan, four claimants presented themselves and the succession was decided in the field.

## The founding act that created the fork

The determinacy failure alone does not explain the speed. Many orders have survived disputed successions. What made this one fatal was a decision taken at the founding, in the first year, by the founder himself.

Bumin, having declared himself khagan in 552, made his younger brother **Istämi** ruler of the west with the title *yabghu* — a viceroy commanding the western half of the domain, with his own armies, his own diplomacy, his own capital at Suyab and, in due course, his own dynastic line through his son Tardu. Bumin died within months of the founding. Istämi ruled in the west until 575 and was succeeded there by his son.

Read that through the framework and it is a textbook instance of the failure mode identified earlier. **The floor was divided at the moment of founding, and both halves ran to men of the same lineage.** From 552 there were two centres of command, each holding the anchor's qualification in full. And this arrangement was entirely rational as an administrative response to distance — six million square kilometres cannot be governed from one camp on horseback — which is exactly what makes it dangerous. Like every second-author problem in the corpus, it looked at the time like a sensible provision rather than a rupture.

The project's most recent volume established a proposition that this case now confirms outside a religious setting. **Floors divide without loss; anchors do not.** A

coercive capacity can be partitioned between two commanders and each half remains fully a floor. An authorisation cannot be partitioned, because an authorisation is a statement that something is *uniquely* so, and two sources make it a statement about which source you asked. The Türk arrangement divided the floor cleanly and left the anchor undivided and shared — which is stable exactly as long as no question arises that the anchor must answer and cannot. In 581 that question arose.

So the finding transfers. **Forking is not ecclesiastical. It is a property of authorisation as such**, and the Türk case shows it operating in a wholly secular order that had no scripture to disagree about, no theology, no canon law, and no clergy. Two men, one bloodline, one heaven, and no way to say which.

## The finding: no gap, therefore no horizontal function

Now the diagnostic that matters most for this paper, and the reason this case earns its place here rather than in a case-study volume of its own.

**Who interpreted the anchor? Nobody.** There was no interpreter class. There was no institution outside the competition qualified to say which Ashina held heaven's mandate. The khagan was his own interpreter, and Tengri's favour was read off the only evidence available — success. The man who won had evidently been favoured; the man who lost had evidently not.

Part IV named specialisation as the first of three conditions turning raw material into a working anchor, on the grounds that the anchor lives in the gap between the men who hold the meanings and the men who hold the weapons. Here the gap did not exist. The meanings and the weapons were held by the same hands, and the anchor had nowhere to live.

Follow the consequence through the distinction of Part III, and the case delivers a result the framework did not obviously predict. Part III argued that capture of the interpreter class destroys the vertical function and spares the horizontal one. The Türk case is the null instance of the same experiment: **where there is no interpreter class at all, neither function exists.**

The vertical absence is unsurprising and had no immediate cost; nobody was ever going to tell a khagan he was wrong, and the order did not need that to hold together. The horizontal absence is what killed it. In 581 the four claimants had no common source to appeal to. The anchor could not answer the question, because answering required an interpreter, and every available interpreter was a claimant. And so the standard collapsed into the only test available, which was victory — the proposition that heaven favours whoever wins.

That proposition is not the absence of a rule. It is a rule, and it is the specific rule this project has identified as the constitution of warlordism. It gives every bystander a perfectly clear instruction: *establish who is currently strongest and align with him*. Which means every claim must be re-checked against present strength, continuously, by everyone — a standard requiring maximum consultation and therefore settling nothing, ever. The Ashina bloodline was as unforgeable as any anchor in the corpus and it could not do the one job an anchor exists to do, because there was nobody outside the contest to read it.

## The controlled comparison: why the Chinggisids worked

The strongest evidence that this is the operative variable rather than an artefact of a difficult century comes from the same steppe, six hundred and fifty years later.

The Chinggisid anchor was the same *type* in nearly every respect: a sacred ruling bloodline holding a mandate from the eternal sky, unforgeable by conquest, determinate about lineage and problematic about member, sustained by a mobile pastoral people over enormous distances with the same logistical constraints. The Mongol empire also divided into regional khanates, also suffered succession crises, and also fragmented.

And the Chinggisid *principle* outlived all of it. Long after the empire had dissolved, descent from Genghis remained the recognised qualification for rule across the steppe world — enforced not by any Mongol state but by the expectations of everyone in the region. That is why Timur, who conquered from Delhi to Ankara in the late fourteenth century and could have called himself anything he liked, took the subordinate title of royal son-in-law, married a Chinggisid princess, and ruled through puppet khans he could have dispensed with in an afternoon. He paid a real, avoidable price to an anchor he could not forge, three generations after the empire that carried it had ceased to function.

The Ashina claim never reached that condition. Nothing outside the Ashina held it in place; no other people enforced it; when the family divided, the claim divided with it, because it had no independent existence. Two differences seem to account for this, and I would rank them in this order.

**Time.** The Chinggisid principle had a century and a half of unbroken common knowledge behind it before it was seriously tested by an outsider, plus a founding narrative that had passed out of living memory. The Ashina claim was tested twenty-nine years after its assertion, by men who had personally watched Bumin rise from serving another confederation to destroying it. **An anchor asserted by the founder's own generation cannot do the horizontal job, because the men it must coordinate**

**watched it being minted.** This is Part IV's argument arriving in a case rather than in principle, and it is why the origin paper's claim that anchors are found rather than made is not merely an observation about provenance but a claim about *elapsed time*.

**Institutional residue.** The later Mongol world developed things the First Khaganate had not: an assembly, the *quriltai*, whose confirmation of a khan was a recognised requirement, however often it was contested; a law attributed to the founder; and eventually, in most successor khanates, an adopted religion with an interpreter class attached, at which point the gap existed and something could live in it. The Türks in 581 had no assembly with a recognised competence, no law-code attributed to Bumin, and no clergy. They had a family, a sky, and an army.

I want to flag one alternative reading rather than bury it: it is possible that the Chinggisid principle looks robust to us because it is reported by later sources with an interest in its robustness, and that we are reading a survivor's account of its own inevitability. That is the solvent applied to my own comparison, and I cannot fully answer it.

## What this case does to the framework

Four results, of decreasing confidence.

**One: forking is general, not ecclesiastical.** An authorisation cannot be divided against itself on the same question, and the demonstration now exists in a secular order with no scripture, no theology and no priesthood. The finding transfers.

**Two: a fork with no interpreter class is unrepairable in principle.** The project's schism volume found that a divided authority was repaired by a specific combination — an outside enforcer with a floor, plus a donation of legitimacy from inside — and that a repair attempted without both merely produced a third claimant. The Türk fork had neither, and could not have had either, because there was no corporate body from which legitimacy could be donated and no external power that both halves recognised. Which sharpens the schism volume's finding about institutional credentials: reach, capturability, forkability and **repairability** are one property, and a bloodline held by no institution scores at the bottom on the last. It cannot be mended because there is nobody with standing to mend it.

**Three: the horizontal function requires an interpreter who is not a claimant, and its absence is fatal on a generational timescale rather than immediately.** The order was not weak in 552; it was the most successful new power in Eurasia. What it lacked did not show until the first contested succession, which is what the framework would predict, since the horizontal function is only tested when the anchor is asked a question.

**And four, more tentatively: this is a data point for the third instrument's prediction**, which held that neighbour-recorded failures should show anchor-absence, forgeability or indeterminacy at a higher rate than the survivor set. Here the anchor was present and unforgeable and *indeterminate*, with no interpreter to resolve the indeterminacy. One case is not a rate. It is a demonstration that the instrument produces a codable result, which is all a first application can do.

## Where this case strains

Five problems, stated at full strength.

**The sources have a stake in the finding.** A Chinese court historian had a standing interest in reporting that steppe confederations were inherently unstable and that Türk princes could be turned against one another, because that was both true and politically useful, and because Tang policy actively pursued it. A study concluding that the khaganate fell to internal division is agreeing with its hostile sources about the thing those sources most wanted to be true. I do not think this defeats the reading — the fracture of 581 and the formal division of 603 are events, not characterisations — but the interpretation of *why* is more exposed than the chronology.

**Tengrism may have had specialists I cannot see.** Steppe societies had ritual practitioners, and the absence of a priesthood in the surviving record may reflect what foreign observers found worth recording rather than what existed. The claim I am confident of is narrower and sufficient: there was no *institutional* interpretive body holding a credential the khagans could not revoke, no closed text, and no corporate authority that could have adjudicated between two Ashina. That is what the horizontal function required and it demonstrably was not there.

**Twenty-nine years may be bad luck.** Bumin died within months of the founding. His eldest son died the following year. Three rulers passed in the first two years of a new order, and no institution is robust to that. A framework that reads structural failure into what may be an actuarial accident is over-reading, and I cannot exclude it.

**The Chinggisid comparison may be reading backwards.** I have treated the later Mongol case as the same anchor type done differently, which assumes a similarity the sources may be constructing.

**And the conquest problem.** The Tang conquered the eastern khaganate in 630. This project excludes conquest from evidence about anchors, on the principle that a demolished building tells us nothing about its foundations. The exclusion has to be applied carefully here, and applying it is what makes the case usable: **the fracture of 581 and the formal division of 603 both precede the conquest by decades.** The order forked from within and was conquered afterwards, in two pieces, having already

ceased to be one thing. It is therefore an internal failure followed by an external death, and only the first half is evidence. Had the sequence run the other way, the case would have to be discarded, and the discipline of asking the question is worth more than the answer in this instance.

# Part VIII — What this predicts

*Stated so that it can fail.*

The following are predictions rather than findings. Each carries what would count against it, because a synthesis that cannot be disappointed is not worth assembling. The first six are general; the seventh is the one the preceding case has already begun to test.

**P1 — Vertical failure precedes horizontal failure, and orders die of the second.** In orders whose interpretive class became state-appointed and state-funded, constraints on the apex should disappear rapidly while coordination among title-holders continues undisturbed; and the terminal crisis, when it comes, should be traceable to the emergence of a second author of title rather than to the servility of the interpreters. *Falsified if* orders characteristically enter warlordism shortly after their clergy is captured, with no independent second author appearing.

**P2 — Contemporary enemies distinguish found grounds from made ones.** Across a coded sample, orders that failed within a founder's lifetime plus one generation should show contemporary hostile criticism attacking the *novelty* of the source at a markedly higher rate than orders lasting five generations or more, in which hostile criticism should instead allege *violation*. *Falsified if* the rates are similar, or if long-lived orders show heavy contemporary novelty-criticism.

**P3 — The neighbour-recorded failures should look different from the survivors.** Attempted settlements documented from outside — steppe confederations, short-lived conquest states, failed secessions — should show anchor-absence, anchor-forgeability, or an indeterminacy the order had no institution to resolve, at a higher rate than the survivor set. *Falsified if* failed orders routinely possessed sound, inherited, unforgeable and determinate anchors and failed anyway, which would indicate that the anchor is not the operative variable and that the project has been reading a correlate.

**P4 — Foreign-office credentials produce vertical contests; state-set credentials produce none.** Orders whose interpretive credential is issued outside the ruler's reach should generate documented constitutional conflicts between apex and interpreter; orders whose credential is state-issued should generate individual heroic refusals and no institutional capacity to compel, regardless of the interpreters' numbers or prestige. *Falsified if* state-credentialled interpretive classes are found to have mounted sustained institutional challenges to their own rulers and made them stick.

**P5 — Legal circumscription tracks the absence of natural walls.** Statutory binding of populations to land or registry should appear disproportionately where geography supplies no barriers, and should accompany rather than long postdate consolidation. *Falsified if* legal binding appears mainly as a late consequence of state strength in already-circumscribed territories.

**P6 — Leased belief has a fork problem.** Where an empire governs by leaving subject populations' own hierarchies intact, the arrangement should be available only to populations possessing a separable, textually-grounded hierarchy; and populations constituting a *fork within the ruler's own creed* — the same anchor read differently — should be unable to receive it, because granting them a self-governing hierarchy would concede that the ruling ground yields two answers. The prediction that follows is counter-intuitive and therefore worth having: **coercive violence should vary inversely with doctrinal distance from the ruling creed.** *Falsified if* the doctrinally nearest subject populations are systematically the best-treated.

**P7 — Time is a component of the anchor, not a correlate of it.** The interval between an anchor's first assertion and its first contested application should predict whether it survives that application, independently of the anchor's other properties. An unforgeable, determinate anchor tested in its founder's generation should fail more often than a forgeable, indeterminate one tested after four. *Falsified if* newly-asserted anchors survive first tests at the same rate as long-established ones with equivalent structural properties — which would mean age is a marker of orders that were going to survive anyway rather than a cause of their surviving.

And the architecture as a whole fails if the following is found: **a long-durable order, not conquered from outside, in which armed elites held heritable holdings authored by a source that the strongest man among them could and demonstrably did revise at will.** That is the case the framework says cannot exist. It is the one to go looking for, and looking for it is a better use of the next several studies than adding confirmations.

# Part IX — Where this is weak

*Eight problems, one of which may be fatal to the whole programme.*

**The vertical/horizontal distinction may be unfalsifiable in exactly the way it was built to fix.** Having defined the horizontal function as the silent maintenance of single authorship, I can attribute its persistence to any order that persisted and its failure to any that failed, without independently measuring either. The distinction earns its keep only if single authorship can be scored from documents without reference to the outcome — by asking whether any party other than the anchor issued heritable grants, and when, and to whom. That is checkable in principle. It has not been done, and until it is, Part III is a plausible reconciliation rather than a demonstrated finding.

**The neighbours' archives carry their own selection and their own genre.** Chinese and Roman accounts of frontier peoples are shaped by court politics and literary convention, and the failures they record are the failures worth reporting. The Türk case above is exposed to this directly and I have said so there. Using such archives as a control group substitutes a new bias for an old one, and the honest claim is narrowing rather than removal.

**The hostile-witness test has a known failure and probably has more.** Nationalism defeats it. It may also fail wherever the surviving criticism was itself curated by winners, which is a real hazard: hostile chronicles survive when somebody later found them useful. Badāʾūnī survives partly because Akbar's successors had reason to tolerate criticism of Akbar.

**Tabulating one's own cases tests nothing external,** and there is a subtler version of the problem: the diagnostics were built by reading these cases, so the grid will show the framework's categories fitting the material that generated them. That is not evidence, and presenting it as evidence would be a worse error than never building the table.

**One demonstration is not a programme.** Part VII applies the instruments to a single order. A single application shows that the method produces a codable result; it does not show that the results will be distributed as P3 predicts. The correct reading of Part VII is that the programme is feasible, not that it has been run.

**The whole architecture may be over-fitted to a particular kind of society** — literate or literate-adjacent, agrarian or agrarian-taxing, circumscribed, patrilineal, with a specialised interpretive stratum and a written legal tradition. Which is to say, over-

fitted to the kind of society that produces the archives the project reads. Every one of the three instruments is an attempt to escape this and none of them fully does; even the Türk case is visible only because it stood next to China.

**The claim that sincerity is the manufacturing process is not verifiable and may not be meaningful.** We have no access to the mental states of people who built cosmologies, and the categories "sincere" and "instrumental" may not map onto a world in which the distinction between explaining the flood and claiming authority over the floodplain was not drawn as we draw it. The argument may be projecting a modern separation backwards onto people who would not have recognised it.

**And the deepest problem, which I do not think is solved.** To include a failed order in a negative sample, one must first identify it as *an attempt at settlement that failed* — and that identification uses the framework's own categories. A steppe confederation that dissolved is a failed settlement only on a reading that says it was trying to become one. If the negative cases are selected by the theory they are meant to test, the control group is contaminated at the point of construction, and the whole programme of Part VI collapses into a more elaborate version of the original problem.

The best answer I can offer is partial and should be treated as such: **code the negative sample on criteria external to the framework before applying the framework to it.** How many years elapsed between founding and first fragmentation. Whether any leadership transition occurred without armed contest. Whether taxation or levy continued across such a transition. Whether any two successive rulers came from the same house. These are ascertainable from hostile sources without any theory of anchors, and they define a failed settlement without presupposing what a settlement requires. Whether that is sufficient independence I do not know, and I would rather leave the problem visible than dress it in a solution.

# Part X — The excluded, and the discipline

*Who was inside the floor and outside the settlement, and why an origin paper owes this more than most.*

This project holds that every study must name the people who were inside an order's coercive reach but outside its settlement — armed or armed-adjacent, contained rather than governed, holding no title the anchor authored. That is where the violence concentrates, and it is the finding most often missed, because a framework about how armed men stop fighting each other attends naturally to the men who stopped.

A paper about origins owes this more than most, for a reason that is specific and uncomfortable.

## The founding condition is that somebody could not leave

Circumscription is not a background variable in this account. Part IV makes it one of the three things that turn raw material into a working anchor, and the mechanism is not subtle: where the defeated can disperse, no settlement is needed and none forms, because walking away is cheaper than submitting. Which means that the entire apparatus this paper describes — the coordination among armed peers, the conversion of possession into ownership, the peace that the project has spent thirty studies admiring as an achievement — **rests on a population that had nowhere to go.**

That is uncomfortable enough where geography supplied the condition. It is worse where it did not, because there the condition was **built**.

The legal-circumscription finding is not an interesting technical extension of Carneiro. It is the observation that states have repeatedly and deliberately manufactured, in statute, the walls that make subordination cheaper than flight. Late Roman legislation bound cultivators to the estates they worked and made their children bound in turn, converting tenants into a hereditary category attached to soil. Russian serfdom hardened across the same centuries in which the Muscovite state consolidated, progressively abolishing the peasant's right to depart until the right was gone entirely. Household-registration systems across several civilisations made an unregistered person legally nowhere — not free, but non-existent, and therefore

takeable. In each case a state facing an open frontier closed it with law because it could not close it with terrain.

So the sentence the framework has to be able to say without flinching is this. **The orders this project studies were made possible by the immobilisation of the people who fed them, and where nature did not immobilise them, law did.** The coordination among armed men that the framework explains so carefully was purchased by removing, from a much larger number of unarmed men, the only remedy they had ever had.

## Two outsides

There are two, and both need naming, because the framework models one and hands the other to a different tradition.

The **internally excluded** are inside the territory and outside the settlement. The mercenaries who could hold no citizen land and whose only leverage was mutiny. The slave soldiery bred to hold power and forbidden to found lineages. The subject populations whose hierarchies were leased rather than enfranchised, so that they were governed cheaply and represented nowhere. The heterodox who could not be leased at all, because a fork in the ruler's own creed cannot be granted its own hierarchy without conceding that the ruling ground yields two answers — which is why, in a leasing empire, doctrinal proximity is dangerous and distance is comparatively safe.

The **externally rival** are outside the territory, running a competing anchor of their own. Every anchor is inside-facing by construction. It pacifies an inside only by constituting an outside, and the war it ends within, it relocates to the edge. A settled hierarchy is not a peaceful world; it is a world in which the violence has been moved and rescaled. In the case worked above, this is nearly the whole story: the First Khaganate's internal fracture was actively cultivated from outside by a Chinese court that understood the mechanism perfectly well, and the fragments were consumed by the power that had helped divide them.

## The wound

And the apparatus itself carries what this project calls the wound. **The seam that coordinates a society is the same seam that, captured, commits atrocity at scale.** The machinery that lifts a people above warlordism is not a different machine from the one that organises persecution, deportation and famine. It is the identical machine — the same capacity to make a claim common knowledge, the same interpreters, the same valves of formation and suppression — and its capacity for the second is proportional

to its competence at the first. Distributed, headless orders cannot organise atrocity at scale for the same reason they cannot organise irrigation at scale.

There is no version of this argument in which the good half can be kept and the other discarded, and any reading of this paper as an appreciation of well-made hierarchy has misread it.

## Legibility is not pardon

To explain why an order enslaved, bound, expelled or burned is not to soften it, and the elegance of a mechanism is not a defence of what the mechanism did.

This paper has been written in the register of engineering, because that register is clarifying and because vagueness about mechanism has protected more atrocities than it has prevented. But the register is a choice with a cost, and the cost is that it makes ruin sound like design and suffering sound like a variable. So it should be said plainly at least once, outside the vocabulary the rest of the paper uses. The people who could not leave were not a condition of state formation. They were people who could not leave. The men in the Ashina succession war of 581 were not a data point about determinacy; the herds and camps they fought across belonged to people who had not been asked. And the several centuries of cheap, stable, well-anchored rule that this project has repeatedly identified as the successful outcome were cheap because somebody was paying, and stable because somebody could not move.

# Conclusion

*What holds, what does not, and what the next work has to be.*

Four papers in this project describe one machine. Specialisation divides not only labour but knowing, so that every person in a complex society must delegate most of what he holds to sources he cannot check. That forced delegation builds a permanent position between the many and the knowledge they cannot reach. The position is occupied by a class of interpreters. And what they interpret is a source of title that no current claimant could have produced. The mind's conditional trust — which reads competence, consensus, coherence and costly commitment because it cannot read the thing itself — is why age is the strongest available credential, and therefore why every new ground in the record is announced as a recovery. The source cannot be manufactured, because the property it needs is a fact about its history rather than a feature of its design; so it is always exapted, made for something else by people who were not playing and picked up later by people who were.

Pressing that architecture until it broke produced the paper's central correction. The interpretive class does two jobs, not one. **Capture destroys its capacity to constrain the apex and leaves untouched its capacity to coordinate the peers** — which is why thoroughly servile clergies are compatible with centuries of stability, why national churches do not produce Canossas, and why orders die not when the priest is bought but when a second author of title appears. Control over the interpreters is cheap in a ruler's own lifetime and expensive only across generations, which is exactly the class of trade that human institutions are worst at refusing.

Running the instruments on a failure sharpened the correction into something the survivor cases could not have shown. The First Türk Khaganate had an anchor that was unforgeable by anyone, common knowledge across a continent, and worth nothing when it was asked a question — because there was no one outside the contest qualified to read it. **The horizontal function does not belong to the anchor. It belongs to the relation between an anchor and an interpreter who is not a claimant.** A bloodline with no institution behind it cannot be forged, cannot be forked without being destroyed, and cannot be repaired, because there is nobody with standing to mend it. And an anchor asserted twenty-nine years earlier by men still living cannot coordinate the people who watched it being asserted, which makes elapsed time a component of the thing rather than a description of it.

But the honest conclusion of this paper is not a finding. It is a condition of possibility.

This project has been reading returning bombers. The regularities it has assembled are real regularities *of the surviving record*, and until the missing half is brought into view there is no way to tell which of them are facts about how orders hold together and which are facts about which orders write things down. That is not a reason to discard the corpus. It is a reason to change what the next work is for. The failures are far less invisible than the premise assumed: they sit displaced in the archives of literate neighbours, they sit fully documented in the substantial population of orders that consolidated and then failed within a generation or two, and the manufacture of a ground is visible wherever somebody objected to it at the time. The thirty cases already worked can be put in a grid this year at no research cost, with a near-certainty that some of them will turn out to disagree with each other.

The single sentence I would want carried forward is this. **An anchor is a coordination technology made of material nobody manufactured, read by interpreters who are nearly always bought, doing a job that survives being bought but does not survive being absent — and almost everything we know about it, we learned from the ones that worked.** The first three clauses are the theory. The fourth is why the theory is not yet finished, and it is the only part of this paper that is certainly true.

# A note on sources and scholarship

*Every borrowed idea is explained in the text rather than invoked on authority; this note gives the references and the reservations.*

**On the commitment problem.** James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization* 49:3 (1995), for the argument that rational parties fight wars both would prefer to avoid, and for commitment problems as one of the mechanisms. The application to warlordism among armed peers is this project's.

**On coordination and third-party punishment.** Barry R. Weingast, "The Political Foundations of Democracy and the Rule of Law," *American Political Science Review* 91:2 (1997), for the sovereign–citizen coordination model and the role of a shared standard in defining transgression. The horizontal application among armed peers is this project's extension and is flagged as such rather than smuggled in.

**On common knowledge and ceremony.** Michael Suk-Young Chwe, *Rational Ritual: Culture, Coordination, and Common Knowledge* (2001), for public ritual as a generator of common knowledge rather than a transmitter of content.

**On obligate social learning and open vigilance.** The account of humans as cultural learners draws on the literature associated with Joseph Henrich. The open-vigilance framework — conditional acceptance filtered on competence, benevolence, consensus, coherence and costly commitment — is Dan Sperber and Hugo Mercier's, in Sperber et al., "Epistemic Vigilance," *Mind and Language* 25:4 (2010), and in Mercier's *Not Born Yesterday* (2020). The application to elite capture of those cues is this project's paper *The Exploit*.

**On the division of labour and of knowing.** Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), for both the opening argument and the darker passage in Book V on the narrowing of the understanding by narrow employment. Friedrich Hayek, "The Use of Knowledge in Society," *American Economic Review* 35:4 (1945), for knowledge dispersed beyond any single mind. Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (1922), for the pseudo-environment, the pictures in our heads, and the official who is in some degree a censor. These are developed at length in this project's paper *The Necessary Seam*.

**On exaptation.** Stephen Jay Gould and Elisabeth S. Vrba, "Exaptation — A Missing Term in the Science of Form," *Paleobiology* 8:1 (1982). The feather example is the standard illustration in the subsequent literature; the political parallel is this project's.

**On circumscription.** Robert L. Carneiro, "A Theory of the Origin of the State," *Science* 169:3947 (1970), for environmental circumscription and the Peruvian–Amazonian contrast. Carneiro has been contested since publication; several primary states fit the model awkwardly, and the correlation between bounded land and state formation is compatible with other causal stories, since bounded fertile land is also the land most worth fighting over and most easily taxed. The extension to **legal** circumscription is the project author's, not Carneiro's.

**On invented tradition.** Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (1983; rev. 1991). These are used in Part IV as the strongest objection to the argument rather than as support for it.

**On survivorship.** Abraham Wald, "A Method of Estimating Plane Vulnerability Based on Damage of Survivors," Statistical Research Group, Columbia University (1943; reprinted 1980). The frequently-repeated anecdote in which Wald personally corrects a room of officers has no documentary support and is treated here as legend; the memoranda are the substance.

**On Akbar's *maḥẓar*.** The document of 1579 is known principally through ʿAbd al-Qādir Badāʾūnī's *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, a hostile chronicle by an orthodox scholar at Akbar's court, concealed during the emperor's lifetime and made public under Jahangir. The correction of the traditional label "Infallibility Decree" — that the document is a *maḥẓar*, an attestation, and not a *farmān*, a command — follows Nandini Chatterjee, "Mahzar-namas in the Mughal and British Empires: The Uses of an Indo-Islamic Legal Form," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 58:2 (2016). Badāʾūnī's reliability is contested, which is noted rather than resolved; his hostility is itself the evidence used in Part VI.

**On the First Türk Khaganate.** The chronology follows the standard reconstruction: Bumin's revolt against the Rouran and his assumption of the title of khagan in 552; his death within months and the succession of Issik and then Muqan; the appointment of his brother Istämi as *yabghu* of the west with his capital at Suyab, and Istämi's succession by his son Tardu in 575; the death of Taspar Qaghan in 581 and the civil war among four claimants that followed; Tardu's brief reunification of the title from 599; his death in 603 and the permanent division into eastern and western khaganates; the Tang conquest of the eastern khaganate in 630 and of the western in the 650s. The territorial extent, reaching from Manchuria towards the Black Sea at its height in the 570s, follows the standard maps. The primary evidence is overwhelmingly external: the Chinese dynastic histories (*Zhoushu*, *Suishu*, *Beishi*, and the Tang compilations) for chronology and genealogy; Menander Protector for the Byzantine

embassies of c. 569–571 and the western khaganate's diplomacy; and Sogdian material for the administration. The **Bugut inscription**, raised in the Orkhon valley c. 581–584 for Taspar Qaghan on a wolf-crowned stele, is in Sogdian, and is the point at which the khaganate's dependence on a subject scribal people becomes visible in stone. The Old Turkic **Orkhon inscriptions** — the Tonyukuk stele of c. 716 and the Kül Tigin and Bilge Khagan stelae of 732 and 735, composed by Yollıg Tigin and deciphered by Vilhelm Thomsen in 1893 — belong to the *Second* Türk Khaganate and postdate the events described here by roughly a century and a half. They narrate the origins of the Türks, a golden age, subjugation by China and liberation by Bilge Khagan, which is to say that the only surviving native account of the First Khaganate is a successor order's history written in the grammar of recovery — an instance of the pattern identified in Part I rather than independent testimony about the sixth century. Readers should note that Inner Asian chronology and the reconstruction of Ashina genealogy are actively debated, that the Chinese sources have their own agenda regarding steppe disunity as discussed in Part VII, and that this study makes no claim to original work in a field it has entered as a visitor.

**On the framework applied.** The apparatus of possession, ownership, anchor, floor, interpreter class and the two audiences is developed across this project's other papers and its roughly thirty case studies, and is restated here in compressed form so that this volume stands alone. The amendment to the two-audiences claim recorded in the compressed framework, and the fork-and-lease prediction at P6, were produced in discussion preceding this paper and are recorded here for the first time.

**On what is not attempted.** This paper makes no claim to original historical research. It is an analytical synthesis applying a structural framework to an established and in places contested record, and its principal contribution is methodological: to state four papers as one architecture, to correct one of them, to propose instruments by which the resulting account could be shown to be wrong, and to use those instruments once so that the proposal is not merely a wish. It corrects *The Found Ground* on the consequences of interpreter capture, extends this project's most recent volume by transferring its finding on forking out of an ecclesiastical setting, and supersedes none of the earlier papers, which are left standing as written so that the advance remains visible as something the evidence forced.